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THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF TRANSLATING *PROMETHEUS BOUND*

Yopie Prins

IΩ

The *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus has a long history of political readings, revolving around Prometheus as a radical revolutionary, a crucified martyr, a prophetic philosopher, an intellectual humanist, a national hero, a dangerous anti-monarchist, a sublime Satan, a prototype of technological man. But it is also a play about the politics of reading and writing, since Prometheus proclaims he gave the Greek alphabet to humanity along with the gift of fire: “I taught to mankind the composition of letters [*grammata*], which is the memory of all things” (11.460–61). As a technology for memorization, the invention of alphabetic script serves as a metaphor for memory itself, used by Prometheus in narrating the story of Io. When she appears on stage in the shape of a cow, driven mad by the eros of Zeus and the ire of Hera, Prometheus predicts her future: “First to you, Io, I will tell the tale of your far-driven wandering, which you must inscribe in the remembering tablets of your mind” (11.788–89). Io must memorize the words of Prometheus by incorporating them—literally inscribing the letters on the writing tablet (*deltos*) of her body (the internal organ known as the *phren*)—so that she may read and remember them as her own story.

How do we read this memorable scene with Io? It was an Aeschylean innovation to introduce her into the story of Prometheus. Just as Prometheus teaches Io to remember the letters inscribed on her body, he teaches the chorus in the play, and by extension the audience of the play, to read the tragic spectacle of his own suffering body. From the god who invented the Greek alphabet, the audience therefore learns to reflect on the political implications of literacy, including its sexual

politics. Having taught the composition of letters to save humanity, Prometheus demonstrates the imposition of letters more specifically on the female body. Writing on the *deltos* of her memory is a sexual metaphor, making the discourse with Prometheus sound prophetic of her future intercourse with Zeus, the god who will leave his seed like a mark on her womb: the first letter of his name (*Dios* in the genitive) is a *delta*. The Io episode thus dramatizes “the equivocation that lies at the heart of so many Greek representations of writing,” noted by Deborah Steiner in *The Tyrant’s Writ*: writing could be used for the institution of democracy to guarantee the freedom of citizens or for the imposition of tyranny especially on women and slaves (8). If, as Steiner concludes, “the paradox of Greek accounts of writing is that they simultaneously disguise and expose the coercive properties at the heart of alphabetic script” (248), then Io is the embodiment of that paradox, dramatizing both the pathos and the eros of Greek letters written on her body.

The dramatization of literacy in *Prometheus Bound* sets the stage for the reception of the tragedy in translation as well. In 1773 *Prometheus Bound* was the first play of Aeschylus to be translated into English, and as other translations followed in the course of the nineteenth century, the play was not so much acted on stage but more often enacted by translators as a textual performance, to make a claim to classical literacy.¹ In transcribing and translating the Greek alphabet, each translator was “bound,” with various degrees of freedom and constraint, to the text of *Prometheus Bound*. The translator’s bondage could be played out through identification with Prometheus, whose boundless rhetoric of defiance inspired an abundance of scholarly translations and poetic imitations. Along with classical scholars, romantic poets, and other revolutionaries, women also turned to *Prometheus Bound*. As Lorna Hardwick observes, translating the tragedy became a rite of passage for women, who discovered various kinds of empowerment and subversion in writing their own versions of Prometheus; Isobel Hurst further argues that “translations of classical texts by women writers reveal critiques of nineteenth-century gender politics, particularly when it comes to such texts as *Prometheus Bound*.”²

But in looking for empowerment and critique in translations of *Prometheus Bound*, we should not overlook how women were bound

to translate the play as a performance of subjection as well as mastery, making it a complex reenactment of nineteenth-century gender politics rather than its subversion. Their desire for classical literacy was articulated in specifically gendered ways, not only by amplifying the painful suffering of Prometheus as the central figure of the play, but also through identification with the seemingly marginal figure of Io. Just as Io must learn by heart the letters inscribed on her body, women translators had to memorize and incorporate ancient Greek into a body of writing that suffers the problem of “literal” translation. Considering English translations by three women leading from the nineteenth into the twentieth century—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Janet Case, Edith Hamilton—I will suggest how they used the figure of Io to spell out a question about reading and writing Greek letters that lies at the heart of this tragedy.

E.B.B.: GREEK VERBS IN ME

Among the first English poets to attempt a complete verse translation of *Prometheus Bound* was Elizabeth Barrett (later Browning, or E. B. B.), who published her version anonymously in 1833.³ Unlike her male contemporaries, E. B. B. did not have access to a formal education in classical languages, but she learned ancient Greek from her brother’s tutor. “To comprehend even the Greek alphabet was delight inexpressible,” she wrote at the age of fourteen, in an essay entitled “Glimpses into My Life & Literary Character” (Barrett and Browning 1984, 1:350). Through this identification with the Greek alphabet, it was her ambition to define her literary character (literally) as a Woman of Letters: “To be a good linguist is the height of my ambition & I do not believe that I can ever cease desiring to obtain this!!!” Yet learning Greek grammar also proved a difficult daily discipline: “This is tormenting & sometime agitates me to a painful & almost nervous degree,” she admits, and recalls herself “entangled in one of these perplexities crying very heartily for half an hour because I did not understand Greek!!!” (1:355). Three exclamation points at the end of the sentence emphasize how ancient Greek seemed to “torment,” “agitate,” and “pain” the young Elizabeth. This curious conflation of textual and physical torment anticipates her subsequent entanglement in the text

of *Prometheus Bound*, where the binding of Prometheus dramatizes the ways in which she herself is bound by translating Greek.

The early diaries and letters of E. B. B. record the years that she devoted to Greek grammar for the purpose of reading Greek tragedy, and translating Aeschylus in particular. "Very busy today. Reading Aeschylus & learning the verb τυπτω!!" she wrote in June of 1831, trying to beat the Greek verb *tupto* ("to beat, strike, smite") into her memory (1969, 20). And again the next day she complained, "Such a miserable day! . . . I sate [*sic*] down in my armchairs to put the verbs in μ in me" (21). She described the memorization of Greek verbs as a process of internalization, putting Greek *mi*-verbs into "me" and thus identifying herself with letters of the Greek alphabet. This identification is played out through the figure of Io, as the deformation of a girl into a cow: "After breakfast I began to chew the cud of such *bitter* thoughts . . . that I was glad to begin to *graze*, instead, on the verbs in μ I have learnt them & τυπτω. . . . It certainly was disgraceful that I who can read Greek with some degree of fluency, should have been such & so long an ignoramus about the verbs" (22–23). Learning Greek verbs by heart and inscribing them on the tablets of her memory, E. B. B. turns "me" into the "I" of Io: a melancholy incorporation of dead letters into her own living body.

As a young woman often immobilized by pain, she began translating *Prometheus Bound* in 1832 not only to recreate the language of Promethean defiance but also to intensify his rhetoric of painful suffering. Prometheus willingly subjects himself to pain in order to defy Zeus, as he exclaims toward the end of her translation: "Admit not in thy thought / That I fear-struck by Jove, shall prove a woman, / And supplicate him, loathed as he is, / With feminine upliftings of mine hands, / To free me from these chains" (1833, 52–53). Yet even while Prometheus refuses to "prove a woman," E. B. B. proves a woman by subjecting herself to a Greek text that produces a "feminine" performance of pain in English. In her translator's preface, she admits that any attempt at a literal translation is bound to fail, and begs the reader for forgiveness: "To the literal sense I have endeavoured to bend myself as closely as was poetically possible; but if, after all,—and it is too surely the case,—'quantum mutatus!' must be applied; may the reader say so rather sorrowfully than severely, and forgive my English for not being Greek, and myself for not being Aeschylus" (11). In the

endeavor to “bend” herself to Greek, E. B. B.’s translation creates an increasingly sorrowful effect.

In his first speech, for example, Prometheus calls upon the world to “behold me, by what anguish worn” and he laments “so harsh a chain of suffering” imposed on him by Zeus: “Alas! Alas! My tears / Alike for present and for future flow! / Where lies the bound’ry of my mighty woe?” (1833, 20–21). With this pun on “bound’ry,” E. B. B. emphasizes there are no bounds to the pain suffered by the bound Prometheus, whose cries of woe are repeated and amplified throughout the translation. “Ah me! ah me! ah me!” is his refrain (21–22), and when Io enters the play, she repeats these cries of woe: “Ah me! ah me! ah me! Again the gad-fly spurs me, wretched maid!” (37) Although her laments are different from his in Greek, E. B. B. makes them the same in English: the turn from subject to grammatical object, from “I” to “me,” emphasizes that both Prometheus and Io are objectified through their painful subjection to Zeus.

E. B. B.’s translation further doubles their suffering when Io addresses Prometheus, in a rhetorical chiasmus where “thou” and “me” are intertwined in mutual misery: “Who canst thou be, / Oh miserable thou, who dost acclaim / Such true discourse to miserable me?” (1833, 38). Prometheus in turn addresses Io to “clearly name / Thy future woes,” much as he (true to his own name) has already foreseen his own present and future woes (44). His story is identified with her story, and his words inscribed on her memory: “Io, to thee, / Thy various wand’rings I will first unfold, / Which in the book-memorial of thy mind / Do thou inscribe.” By transposing the metaphor of the writing tablet into a book, the translation creates a double scene of inscription: the Greek words of Prometheus inscribed in Io’s memory were also memorized by E. B. B., who turned them into English words printed on paper and “bound” in a book.

Although the translation was begun as a private exercise, it became a public performance when it was published in 1833, a decision that E. B. B. immediately regretted: “How I have wished that I had never done so,” she confessed in her diary. “If I never had, I never should have been exposed to the pain which has been & is oppressing me” (1969, 217). Looking back on the translation a decade later, she felt it was simultaneously too literal and not literal enough. “My Prometheus is rather close to the letter . . . stiff & hard—a Prometheus

twice bound & to a colder rock than was intended," she wrote in 1842 (Barrett and Browning 1984, 5:26), and she dismissed the translation as "a most miserable of all miserable versions of the class" with "iambics thrown into blank verse, the lyric into rhymed octosyllabics and the like—and the whole together, as cold as Caucasus" (10:102). The patience necessary for translating Greek seemed an unnecessary form of suffering. "It puts me out of patience to see people glorying, evidently how silent, in the multitude of grammars. A dictionary life is the vainest & least exalting of lives," she concluded. "I observe that & have set my face against lingualism" (5:226).

E. B. B. therefore set out to retranslate *Prometheus Bound*, creating a new version that would be more "free" than the first. As she was revising the translation during her courtship correspondence with Robert Browning, she asked him to read and respond, making her painful subjection to the Greek text into a medium of erotic exchange: "Now, it is done—now you are chained—Βία has finished the work . . . I, Ba!—(observe the anagram!)" (Barrett and Browning 1984, 12:132). Playfully casting herself in the role of *Bia* (the allegorical figure of "Force," who binds Prometheus to the rock), she inserted iota into her own nickname ("Ba") in order to observe the forceful reincorporation of Greek letters into herself: "I, Ba!" like the "I" of Io. Thus she continued to play out an identification with the inscription of Greek letters on the body of her own writing, not only in the revised translation of *Prometheus Bound* (published in 1850), but in the portrait of the woman writer in *Aurora Leigh* (published in 1856). In her epic quest to discover "Truth, so far, in my book," Aurora also identifies with the "I" in Io: "I, Aurora, still / Have felt it hound me through the wastes of life / As Jove did Io" (7:827–30). As a fictional character and a generic figure for the Victorian woman of letters, Aurora once again discovers Greek verbs in me, not as a claim to linguistic mastery or subjectivity, but as a form of female authorship subjected to and imprinted by a strange alphabet.

MISS CASE

Although E. B. B. became an exemplary Woman of (Greek) Letters in Victorian England, she was not the only example. With the formation

of women's colleges in the course of the nineteenth century, women gained increasing access to formal education in ancient Greek. Janet Case was among the first generation of women to complete classical studies at Girton College in Cambridge, where she received high marks on her Tripos Examinations, although not a Bachelor of Arts degree.⁴ The withholding of university degrees for women was a recurring complaint at Girton, as in the refrain from a "Prize Song" published in *The Girton Review* (March 1887):

Come grant me the B, come grant me the A,
Come make me your equal without more delay;
Then each learned maid who loves Pindar and Π
Let her hasten to Girton that standeth on high.

Much as the young E. B. B. had aspired to be a good linguist as the height of her ambition, Case was one of those learned maids who hastened "to Girton that standeth on high" to pursue her love for "Pindar and Π." But half a century after E. B. B. proclaimed herself "I, Ba!" through identification with Greek, the desire for the BA made it possible for women to claim Greek in new ways, as part of a collegiate identity. By translating Greek, Case could prove herself a classically educated woman and improve classical education for others as well.

While E. B. B. translated Greek tragedy as a solitary textual performance, Case turned to Greek tragedy for the collective performance of women's higher education. As the president of Girton's Classical Club, newly formed "with a view to promoting acquaintance and mutual help among the classical students," Case hosted regular reading and discussion of classical texts in her rooms at college, focusing in particular on Greek tragedy (*Girton Review*, March 1884). She had the opportunity to perform Greek tragedy in student productions as well: she played the leading role in the *Electra* of Sophocles, presented at Girton in 1883, and she was the only woman invited to participate in the Cambridge Greek play of 1885, when she played Athena in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus. Memorized for recitation in ancient Greek, and fully staged in classical settings and Grecian costumes, these academic performances received a good deal of attention from the popular press. The first issue of *The Woman's World* (edited by Oscar Wilde in 1888) featured an article with two striking illustrations of Case

in Greek costume: a popular icon for “The Girton Girl” and the very embodiment of female classical literacy.⁵ Through her enactment of Greek tragedy, Case transformed a dead language into a living performance, learning Greek letters by heart and thus bringing them to life by inscribing them on her own body.

Despite her love of Greek letters, Case did not make a professional career of philology. After graduating from Girton, she published a few scholarly articles but remained an amateur, one whose passion for Greek was informed by her passion for politics, and vice versa. She became an ardent advocate for women’s suffrage and the higher education of women, sponsoring the performance of Greek plays as fundraisers for Bedford College for Women, and tutoring classics to private pupils around London. Most famous among these pupils was Virginia Woolf, who fondly recalled in her early journals how Miss Case “procured a Grammar, & bade me start with the very first exercise” and “never failed to point out, with perfect good humour that my exercises were detestable” (1990, 184). Although Miss Case never seemed to miss a case (grammatically speaking), Woolf also describes how “she would spend a whole lesson in defining the relation of Aeschylus towards Fate” and proved herself “a really valiant strong minded woman. . . . We strayed enough from grammar to let me see this” (183–84). The strong mind of this woman was strengthened by Greek, as Woolf later wrote in her obituary for Case: she was “a noble Athena, breaking down the tradition that only men acted in the Greek play” (Alley, 298).

Case defined herself as a social activist through Greek tragedy in particular, not only by enacting it on stage but also by translating it on the page. She taught Woolf to read Greek tragedy at a time when she was preparing her own translation of *Prometheus Bound* for publication in 1905: an inexpensive pocket-sized edition, designed for amateurs who were lovers of Greek but not philologists.⁶ With Greek and English text on facing pages, this small book anticipated the great mission of the new Loeb Classical Library, founded in 1911 and enthusiastically reviewed by Woolf: “The Loeb Library, with its Greek or Latin on one side of the page and its English on the other, came as a gift of freedom” because “the existence of the amateur was recognized by the publication of this Library” (1987, 114). So also, Case’s translation came as a gift of freedom: with Greek and English on facing pages,

it was a Promethean effort to teach the Greek alphabet to the common man and so bring classical literacy to the masses. In her introduction, Case explained the myth of Prometheus, outlined the plot of the play, and described to non-scholars the little that is known about its original dramatic setting, "leaving far more to the imagination than to modern minds seems at first probable or even possible" (1905, 26). Appealing to modern readers, she invited them to enter her translation by imagining the theatrical performance of the play and becoming part of its broader audience.

Case was especially interested in *Prometheus Bound* because of its revolutionary politics, liberating men (and by implication, women) from the bonds of tyranny. In 1904 she published a short article on two lines in the text, speculating about "the development of Zeus," who might be gradually reformed from tyrant into just ruler (1904, 100). In a subsequent article, entitled "Women in the Plays of Aeschylus," she went on to pursue a more explicitly feminist analysis, emphasizing that "Aeschylus gives his women brains as well as heart" (1914, 7). She praised the chorus of *Prometheus Bound* because "these free women, gently bred, full of grace and simplicity, the very flower of loyalty and courage . . . are heart and soul with the splendid rebel who suffers for his love to man," and they "denounce the crude tyranny of Zeus with victory (14–15). To denounce the patriarchy of Zeus even more vigorously, the introduction to her own translation of the play also expressed feminist sympathies with Io, "the cow-horned maid, a fellow-sufferer at the hands of Zeus, driven from land to land by Zeus' love" (1905, 5).

Io's story is told by Case in a page-long footnote (1905, 128–29), and her translation of this episode is especially animated. Distraught and disoriented, Io enters with a series of desperate questions addressed to Prometheus: "What land? What race? Who shall I say is this I see in bonds of rock, storm-beaten? In penance for what sin art thou destroyed? Tell to what part of earth, I, hapless maid, have wandered. Ah, Ah, again some gadfly stings me, unhappy me" (73). The decision to render Greek in English prose makes this translation seem more literal and more accessible to the common reader, like a "crib." Yet the prose translation also verges on poetry, conveying the metrical disturbance of the Greek verse by means of a staccato rhythm, in the

repetition of “what” and “I” and “ah” and “me.” These rhythmic effects are even more distinctive in Io’s final speech, given before she exits:

On, onward! Again a spasm and distracting throes of madness burn me
and the gadfly’s prick, forged not with fire, stings me; and my heart for
fear knocks at my breast; my eyes roll round and round and away from
my course I am borne by my frenzy’s raging blast, and gone the mastery
of my tongue; and troubled words at random stumble against the waves
of baleful doom. (103)

To dramatize the tortured Io, her Greek lament (*eleleu eleleu*, delivered in the meter known as dochmiacs) is translated by Case into an accelerating prose rhythm that shades into anapestic meter. As Io is “borne by my frenzy’s raging blast,” and “troubled words at random stumble against the waves,” both her body and her speech are driven off course, in a translation that repeats in English Io’s painful subjection to the language of suffering.

By dramatizing how Io loses “mastery of my tongue,” Case demonstrated her own mastery of Greek. Yet the more she mastered this ancient tongue, the more she was also mastered by it. Precisely because of her linguistic mastery, her English translation was closely tied to the Greek text, which she bound and published together with a scholarly apparatus that made her book look and sound more antiquarian and less popular than she might have intended in appealing to a broad audience. Nevertheless it was appreciated by at least some of her contemporaries, who thought that Case had found a balance between literal and free translation that was neither completely bound to Greek nor completely unbound from it: “The translation is both scholarly and graceful, the fruit of careful and loving study of the original, while at the same time it reads easily and does not remind us more than it should of the fact that the mind expressed is Greek, not English” (*Girton Review*, March 1905). The expression of a Greek mind, impressed on female character, recalls the conclusion reached by Case in “Women in the Plays of Aeschylus”: “They have been passed through the fire of renewal and have been transmuted into something that bears his stamp upon it” (1914, 23). By translating and publishing this play in particular, Case also passed through a (Promethean) fire of renewal; like Io inscribed with the words of Prometheus, her own mind had been transmuted into something that bore the stamp of Aeschylus.

EDITH HAMILTON'S GREEK WAY

In contrast to Case, whose English translation was not so widely read despite its aspiration to bring classical literacy to the common reader, an American translation of *Prometheus Bound* by Edith Hamilton had more popular success several decades later.⁷ She had studied classics on the other side of the Atlantic, at another women's college famous for its cultivation (not to say cult) of Greek. From 1890 to 1895, Hamilton earned her BA/MA in Greek and Latin at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where she was invited to join Phi Beta Gamma (a short-lived secret society) and won a fellowship for a year of graduate study in Leipzig from 1895 to 1896. But classical scholarship was not her primary interest, as Helen Bacon observes in *Notable American Women*: "Though she became a symbol of scholarship for a large public, Edith Hamilton was not, and did not claim to be, a scholar, or even a popularizer of the scholarly work of others. Throughout her career her commitment was not the scholars' commitment to the facts of the past that require demonstration, but to the unverifiable 'truths of the spirit,' which she thought she found in ancient writers" (308). Hamilton's desire to find the "spirit" in the letter contributed to her broad appeal as a translator and interpreter of Greek tragedy in particular.

After retiring in 1922 as headmistress of the Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore, where she had taught only Latin on occasion, Hamilton returned to Greek and became known for such best-selling books as *The Greek Way* (1930), *The Roman Way* (1932), and her ever-popular *Mythology* (1942). It is no coincidence that her second career as a public intellectual began with translating *Prometheus Bound* as a way to reflect on the civilizing of humanity through classical literacy and the transmission of classics. She first published her translation in 1927 in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, with an introduction that emphasized the modernity of the play: "The *Prometheus* is unlike any other ancient play. Only in the most modern theatre is a parallel to be found. It is a psychological drama," which will not "seem strange to the modern reader, but a real difficulty is presented by Io, a distracted feeling creature, quite mad, who seems now a girl and now a heifer, and by her talk with Prometheus, running into hundreds of lines, which consists largely of geography. These are matters that an ancient and a modern spectator

would necessarily look at different because so much of what was known to them is strange to us and vice versa" (1927, 545–46).

To make the Io episode look less strange to the modern reader, Hamilton developed a contemporary idiom that was more distinctly American than the English translation by Case. Rather than translating the play into prose with Greek text on facing pages, Hamilton translated the Io episode into the spare diction of modernist verse. When Io enters the play, she addresses Prometheus as "a form storm-beaten" in strong two and three-beat lines that emphasize the similarity between his misery and hers. And when she leaves the stage, the pounding beat of the poetry turns Io herself into another storm-beaten form, like Prometheus:

O misery. O misery.
A frenzy tears me.
Madness strikes my mind.
I burn. A frantic sting—
an arrow never forged with fire.
My heart is beating at its walls in terror.
My eyes are whirling wheels.
Away. Away. A raging wind of fury
sweeps through me.
My tongue has lost its power.
My words are like a turbid stream,
wild waves that dash against a surging sea,
the black sea of madness.
[Exit Io] (1927, 560; brackets in original)

The stormy description of her pain, striking with "a raging wind of fury" and "wild waves that dash against a surging sea," anticipates the storm that will descend on Prometheus at the end of the play: "Whirlwinds toss the swirling dust. / The blasts of all the winds are battling in the air, / And sky and sea are one. / On me the tempest falls" (562). Like Io, he is reduced from I to "me," the object of suffering.

Hamilton's translation of *Prometheus Bound* was reprinted ten years later in her *Three Greek Plays*, with some revisions and several essays. In the first of these, "On Translating," Hamilton explained that she had taken some liberties in translating Greek tragedy: "I have not held myself bound to any fixed meter," she wrote, "Nor have I made any attempt to keep all the lines the same length" because "the use of a line of varying length sets the translator free from the necessity of padding"

(1937, 18). For Hamilton the paradox of translating *Prometheus Bound* was that she felt simultaneously bound to a fixed text, without holding herself “bound to any fixed meter.” Entangled in the question of “literal” translation, Hamilton asks: “What are [translators] to try for? Not a complete literal fidelity. . . . No: a bald word-for-word translation of a Greek play would accomplish nothing at all” (11). Taking up the idea that a translation should be “as faithful as it can, as free as it must,” she proclaimed her translator’s credo: “I believe that the best a translator can hope for on that point is to convey some of his own enthusiasm, something of the impression the poem made upon him,” but “his enthusiasm will be regulated by a careful regard for the way his original writes” (12). There is no final resolution, then, to the bondage of the translator, who is bound to a literal translation that is also bound to be free. Indeed, like the suffering of Prometheus and Io in her translation, she concluded that “it is the special hardship of a translator’s lot” to suffer the consequences of “misrepresenting or distorting” the original text (14–15).

While Hamilton herself did suffer criticism from some classical scholars for misrepresenting classical texts, to many readers she exemplified the best way to translate Greek into American English. In a popular reprint of *The Greek Way*, for example, C. M. Bowra wrote that

Miss Hamilton started from the best, the right, the only possible point—the actual texts of Greek literature. These she knew from the inside, not through translations and commentaries but through the original words, which are remarkable for their clarity and elegance and force. With this knowledge she was able to turn her feminine intuition in many directions, to adapt herself easily and almost unconsciously to the writers whom she studied, and to extract from their work what appealed most deeply to her and seemed to be the most significant. (xvii)

As a translator, Hamilton seemed to embody the “original” experience of reading Greek: the “remarkable . . . force” of the original words was marked on her own memory and turned into “feminine intuition” that was “almost unconsciously” repeated in her own writing.

Furthermore, her personal identification with Greek letters was incorporated into the body politic. As Judith Hallett notes, Hamilton was “widely read and revered in midcentury America as a modern-day emissary from the enlightening domain of classical antiquity” and often quoted by Robert F. Kennedy, who memorized lines from her

translations of Aeschylus, as if these words had been inscribed in the remembering tablets of his own heart.⁸ Hamilton's insistence on the civilizing power of Athenian democracy contributed to a postwar vision of American democracy at home and abroad. Indeed, she was invited to Greece in 1957 to be made an honorary citizen of Athens, where her translation of *Prometheus Bound* was performed in the Greek amphitheater, and she gave a public speech proclaiming that "freedom was a Greek discovery" and "the Greeks were the first free nation in the world." Paradoxically, it was through her translation from ancient Greek that modern Greeks were supposed to rediscover that they, too, were bound to be free: "In the *Prometheus* they have sent a ringing call down through the centuries to all who would be free."⁹ Hamilton's Greek way had become the American way.

Hamilton was part of a longer Victorian legacy of women, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Janet Case, who turned to Greek tragedy to make their mark as Women of Letters. Through their various translations of *Prometheus Bound*, they dramatized the encounter with ancient Greek as a scene of writing charged with both pleasure and pain, eros and pathos: a scene where the translation of Greek letters could never be literal enough. Turning a personal passion for Greek into a public performance of female classical literacy, these remarkable women inscribed Greek letters on the tablets of their memory like the "I" of Io, to be translated and incorporated into their own body of writing. The Woman of Greek Letters thus became a medium for classical transmission, mediating between classical scholarship and the popularization of classics, and demonstrating the sexual politics implicit in the cultural politics of classical reception.

Notes

1. The first English translation of Aeschylus was Thomas Morrell's *Prometheus in Chains* (1773), followed by Potter's complete *Tragedies of Aeschylus* (1777). On the reception of *Prometheus Bound* within British Romanticism, see Curran.

2. Hurst, 9. On women translating Aeschylus in the nineteenth century, see Hardwick 2000a; 2000c; and the chapter entitled "Reverence and Subversion in Nineteenth-Century Translation" in 2000b. On Victorian women and Greek, see also Fiske; Fowler; McClure; Prins 2006.

3. One year after Thomas Medwin's *Prometheus Bound: A Tragedy* (1832), Barrett published her first version of the play: *Prometheus Bound, Translated from the*

Greek of Aeschylus, and Miscellaneous Poems, by the Translator, Author of "An Essay on Mind," with other poems (London: Valpy, 1833). In 1850 she published a second version, substantially revised for inclusion in her *Poems* (London: Chapman & Hall). The 1833 version is reprinted, with an introduction by Alice Meynell, in *Prometheus Bound and Other Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1896). On Barrett's interest in Prometheus, see Avery; Drummond; Falk; Mermin; Prins 1991; Wallace.

4. On the history of women in the Cambridge Classical Tripos, see Breay; on Janet Case, see Alley and Perry.

5. Engravings of Case in the role of Athena and Electra appear in "Greek Plays at the Universities, by a Graduate of Girtton," *The Woman's World* 1 (1888): 125, 128.

6. Janet Case published her translation in the popular Temple Dramatists Series (Case 1905).

7. Hamilton's translation, "The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus" (1927), was reprinted with some revisions and additional essays in *Three Greek Plays* (1937).

8. Hallett 2009, 153–55. See also Hallett 1996–97.

9. Reid, 114. Reid's "intimate" memoir describes Hamilton's journey to Greece, at the age of ninety, as an advocate for American freedom in the midst of the cold war.

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